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AUTHOR Fine, Michelle
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ABSTRACT

Child care workers may derogate youth in order to restore their own sense of justice and may do so only when they feel organizationally and personally unable to help the youth. The relationship between child care workers' sense of power (both in their agencies and to help youth) and their perceptions of the youth was examined for a sample of 171 child care workers employed in 6 public and 6 private child care agencies. Subjects completed a questionnaire about their agencies, jobs, and the youth with whom they worked. Youth (N=98) completed a comparable instrument. Analyses revealed reliable relationships that substantiated a positive association of perceived organizational power and a personal sense of efficacy with favorable perceptions of the youth and external attributions for their problems. Child care workers who felt able to impact the lives of youth reported favorable impressions; those who tried but were frustrated in their efforts or ineffective tended to derogate. Workers who reported similarities between themselves and the youth tended to feel more powerful and assumed that the youth could be helped. The findings suggest that interventions designed solely for youth may be insufficient to improve conditions in juvenile justice. (NRB)

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Child Care Workers:
Victims, Nonvictims or Victimizers?

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Michelle Fine, Ph.D.
University of Pennsylvania
3700 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, Pa. 19104

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Child care workers employed in residential facilities for youth face society's burdens. As teachers, counselors and surrogate parents, they are supposed to aid youth rejected or neglected by parents, expelled from schools, turned away by family, often undereducated, deprived of basic skills and sometimes in legal trouble. These youth come to group homes voluntarily, as referrals from hospitals, courts, or schools, or adjudicated as PINS (Persons in Need of Services) in NYS. In the language of the injustice literature, the youth - nee-victims become the responsibility of child care workers - nee-nonvictims, predominantly men and women who derive from economic and social conditions comparable to those of the youth. The story of victim derogation, and its relationship to the child care workers' sense of power proceeds.

Workers enter the child care field motivated as saviors for "disadvantaged" youth. Often from the same streets as these adolescents, they soon learn that they are legally responsible to try to reconstitute the family and protect the child (often incompatible demands) and daily deprived of the power, resources and/or access to information required to do so; they are expected to help rehabilitate youth who bring a history of victimization and then held accountable when a butcher knife is stolen from the facility kitchen, when a fight breaks out, when a child runs away, when a young girl learns that she is pregnant (c.f. Lasch, 1979).

Employed to aid the casualties of economic and social injustice, child care workers encounter obstacles and frustration: limited budgets; blocked access to families, schools and community resources; and bureaucratic inertia--agencies are reimbursed for filling beds, not for releasing youth. They are employed in public and private sector agencies. Some agencies are open, flexible and integrated with their communities; others are rigid, bureaucratic and isolated. Some employ staff of over 100; others involve fewer than 10. Victim-blaming, through the derogation and blaming of youth for their circumstances, ranks as a most popular pasttime across agencies.

The social psychology of child care workers motivated initially to help youth raised in imp overished conditions similar to their own, who themselves are deprived of the power and resources required to meet their challenge, in agencies basically disinterested in their input, organized this research.

Child care workers have been considered victims, nonvictims and even victimizers (Edelwich & Brodsky, 1980; Schneiger, 1976). As victims, they work within a bureaucratic service context considered by many to be inadequate to fulfill its often incompatible goals (Harrison, 1980). Many workers eventually come to see themselves as powerless, disillusioned and fallen "saviors", without access to resources and unable to affectuate change (Lerner, 1980). As nonvictims, child

care workers derive from economic and social circumstances similar to the youth, and have progressed to positions in which they can aid these youth. They counsel, parent and deliver services to help the kids overcome often impossible social and economic barriers to adjustment. To sustain this level of functioning--as effective nonvictims--and retain a sense of self-esteem and professional integrity, is considered most difficult (Schneiger, 1976). Complaints of "burnout" and high turnover in this field persist. Finally, as victimizers, many child care workers resort to victim blaming, iedntifying with the system and sometimes to violence (Harrison, 1980). Incidents of abuse and evidence of derogation abound.

The social psychological literature on injustice provides a theoretical understanding of derogation of youth by child care workers. People prefer to perceive life events, e.g. ending up in a juvenile facility, as fair and deserved by those involved. We choose not to view life events as due to chance, illegitimate factors or forces external to the individual (Heider, 1958; Ross & DiTecco, 1975). It is perhaps those individuals who receive and are least deserving of unfair treatment (e.g., youth legally considered victims of parental abuse), who pose the greatest threats to our sense of a just world, and who inherit, therefore, our most fierce derogation. By creating psychologically a society that appears "just" we reinforce our belief that the world is meritocratic, predictable and fair (Lerner, 1980).

When dealing with and powerless to change the conditions of the victims, nonvictims resort to derogation (Lerner & Simmons, 1966). Among helping professionals, we hear such blame and derogation regularly: ridicule of problem drinkers by counselors, of the disabled by therapists and of youth in need of supervision by child care workers (Edelwich & Brodsky, 1980; Harrison, 1980).

In my own research, and that of Robert Folger, Melvin Lerner and Janice Steil (as well as others) nonvictims able to appeal an unjust decision or modify the conditions of the victim readily identify injustice, try to remediate and advocate for victims (Fine, 1981; Folger, et al., 1979; Lerner, 1980; Steil, 1979; Tyler, 1981). Alternatively, nonvictims denied such power tend not to recognize injustice, often justify it and usually derogate victims (Austin & Hatfield, 1980; Moore, 1978). If they are not in a position to compensate or remediate, nonvictims tend to derogate (Walster, Berscheid & Walster, 1973).

Child care workers, like other nonvictims, vary their perceptions of the youth as a function of their power to influence circumstances (Fine, 1981). Child care workers able to help will be motivated to do so and not derogate (c.f. Lerner & Simmons, 1966); those who feel unable to influence the treatment of the youth will more likely convince themselves the youth do not deserve help (Fine, 1979).

The youth in question, already rejected by kin and major social institutions, are unfortunately all too ready to accept

blame for their circumstances. When derogated further by child care workers, family, teachers and/or peers, they willingly attribute responsibility internally. In the world of child welfare, victims and nonvictims too frequently collude to sustain the illusion that the world is fair, and that victims deserve their lot (Lerner, 1980).

It is proposed in this paper that child care workers derogate youth in order to restore their own sense of justice and do so only when they feel organizationally and personally unable to help the youth. This research tests the relationship between child care workers' sense of power in their agencies and to help the youth, with their perceptions of the youth. This study of child care workers permits a theoretical analysis, in an applied setting, of nonvictims' power and their derogation of victims. To the extent that high power enhances workers' perceptions of youth, and encourages external attributions of youths' problems, the pervasive tendency toward derogation in human services may be reduced (c.f. Austin & Hatfield, 1980). Unfortunately, many child care agencies are structured so that child care workers do feel disempowered to help youth. Many feel that the courts, schools and even their own agencies undermine their work. To retain a sense of justice and professional integrity many default to victim-blaming, reinforcing the sense of rejection initially brought into the juvenile justice system by the adolescents (Symonds, 1980). This dynamic precludes effective rehabilitation of the adolescents and reduces the

agencies' capacity to institute justice where injustice has prevailed.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents. One hundred and seventy-one child care workers representing 6 public and 6 private child care agencies in the New York metropolitan area completed a questionnaire about their agencies, jobs and the youth with whom they work. In addition, 98 youth completed a comparable instrument. The data to be presented today include, predominately, the results of the staff questionnaire. The staff sample is evenly divided by gender, 55% of the trainees are women and 45% are men; and heterogeneous by race: 20% are white, 53% black, 17% Hispanic, 7% black non-American, and 3% other.

Staff tend to be:

well distributed in age. The group ranges from 20-64, with the mean age 34.5. Thirty percent of the sample are 20-29; 36% are 30-39; 22% are 40-49; and 7% reported ages of between 50 and 64.

*highly educated. The mean years of schooling is 14. Eight percent are non-high school graduates, 20% have high school diplomas; 39% report 1-3 years of college; 15% graduated from college; and 17% pursued post-graduate training.

*well-experienced in child care. The mean number of years in child care is 4.8. Twenty-three percent of the respondents have been in the "field" for over 10 years, with 37% working in child care between 3 and 8 years.

*substantially senior within their agencies. These staff are basically rooted in their agencies. Only 28% have been with their agencies for less than one year; 26 percent report over three years of working for the same facility.

*5% missing data

*varied in occupations. Although most describe themselves as counselors (60%), 13 percent are supervisors/administrators; 10 percent are program coordinators (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation, recreation, skills); 8 percent are house managers/parents, and the rest are nurses, administrative assistants, researchers and students.

and,

*diverse in salaries. While the majority receive over $11,000 per year (60%), 20 percent earn $9,001 to $11,000 and 10 percent receive salaries of $8,001 to $9,000. Most complain about salary problems; 5 percent earn under $6,000 annually.

Analyses

To condense the wealth of information gathered, data reduction techniques (e.g., scale construction) were applied. An orthogonal Varimax rotation factor analysis was conducted on the 19 perception items--e.g., "the agency is fair to the youth", "overall , the kids are similar to me", "I have a lot of power in the agency " (1-4, 1 = Strongly Agree). (See #3 questionnaire in Appendix A.) Another orthogonal Varimax rotation factor analysis was conducted on the eight attribution items (see #7) in which respondents were asked to rate how much "personality", "family", "neighborhood", "poverty", "race", "friends", "the agency",&"bad luck" contribute to the youths' problems. (1 = not at all; 2 = somewhat; 3 = a lot) From the perception items, three factors emerged, converted into scales (Table 1):

ORGANIZATIONAL
POWER: Comprised of 6 equally weighted items (coded in a common direction) - (Eigenvalue = 3.66, Alpha = .57; variance = 19%)
- I have very little power in this agency

- the agency helps the kids
- the agency is not very fair to kids who are here
- no matter what I do at the agency, it makes no difference
- I like the way this agency is run
- the agency is not very fair to the Child Care Workers who work here.

AFFECTIVE BURNOUT: Comprised of 3 equally weighted items (Eigenvalue = 2.13, Alpha = .48; variance = 12%)

- no matter what I do, I can't seem to get the kids to do the right thing
- when I am frustrated with a kid, I try to keep it to myself
- the only reason the kids say mean things to me is because they don't like me.

DEROGATION OF YOUTH: Comprised of 4 equally weighted items (Eigenvalue = 1.70, Alpha = .35, variance = 9%).

- these kids can't be helped
- the kids are basically good people
- I can really help the kids
- overall, the kids are similar to me.

From the seven attribution items on conditions that contribute to resident youths' problems, three factors of interest emerged (Table 2):

SOCIO-ECONOMIC: Comprised of 3 equally weighted items (Eigenvalue = 2.07, Alpha = .67, variance accounted for 23%).

- neighborhood
- poverty
- race

FRIENDS: Comprised of friends item (not used in analysis) (Eigenvalue = 1.42, variance = 16%).

STATIC: Comprised of 2 equally weighted items (Eigenvalue = 1.35, Alpha = .31, variance = 15%).

- personality
- the agency

TABLE 1

Varimax Rotated Orthogonal Factor Analysis on Perception Items:

Rotated Factor Pattern

		ORANIZATIONAL POWER Factor I	AFFECTIVE BURNOUT Factor II	DEROGATION OF YOUTH Factor III
"The agency helps kids"	(01)	-.73*	-.01	.28
"I feel very close to the other staff:	(02)	-.15	-.21	-.10
"It is important for a person to learn to hide their feelings"	(03)	.39	.35	.10
"The other workers understand the kids better than I"	(04)	-.01	.15	-.03
"The agency is not very fair to the kids who live here"	(05)	.78*	-.02	.04
"I like the way the agency is run"	(06)	-.74*	-.03	.15
"I have very little power in this agency"	(07)	.50*	-.01	-.29
"These kids can't be helped"	(08)	.07	.18	-.65*
"I can really help the kids"	(09)	-.06	-.01	.77*
"The kids are basiccally good people"	(10)	-.25	.07	.68*
"No matter what I do, I can't seem to get the kids to do the right thing"	(11)	-.12	.58*	-.16
"The agency is not very fair to the child care workers who work here"	(12)	.70*	.03	-.01
"Overall, the kids are similar to me"	(13)	-.08	-.09	.41*
"No matter what I do at the agency, it makes no difference"	(14)	.56*	.04	-.21

		ORGANIZATIONAL POWER Factor I	AFFECTIVE BURNOUT Factor II	DEROGATION OF YOUTH Factor III
"Kids' problems are usually their own fault"	(15)	.05	.34	-.22
"When I first started working here, I knew I could really help the kids"	(16)	-.16	.22	.26
"The kids know the difference between right and wrong"	(17)	.09	.26	.04
"When I am frustrated with a kid, I try to keep it to myself"	(18)	.17	.68*	.11
"The only reason the kids say mean things to me is because they don't like me"	(19)	-.07	.80*	-.16
Eigenvalue		3.66	2.13	1.70
Alpha		.57	.48	.35
Variance		19%	12%	9%

*Items included in scale; equally weighted

TABLE 2

Varimax Rotated Orthogonal Factor Analysis on Attribution Items: Factor Pattern

"How much does each of the following contribute to the youths' problems?" (1) = none; (2) = some; (3) = a lot	SOCIO-ECONOMIC Factor I	FRIENDS Factor II	STATIC Factor III
"the kid's personality"	-.05	.37	.62*
"the kid's family"	.21	.35	.08
"friends"	-.01	.76*	.10
"the neighborhood"	.62*	.31	-.32
"the agency"	.04	-.02	.84*
"bad luck"	.13	.20	.11
"poverty"	.83*	.11	-.04
"the kid's race"	.74*	-.20	.38
Eigenvalue	2.07	1.42	1.36
Alpha	.67	-	.31
Variance accounted for	23%	16%	15%

(N) = 140

*Items included in scale, equally weighted

Hypotheses

Data were collected to test a series of predictions about the relationship between child care workers' sense of power (heretofore referred to as POWER, indicating score on ORGANIZATIONAL POWER scale, in which high score equals high power) and his/her perception of the youth (heretofore referred to as YOUTH, indicating score on Derogation of Youth Scale, in which a high score indicates high derogation) and levels of BURNOUT, as well as his/her attributions concerning youths' problems (as measured on SOCIO-ECONOMIC and STATIC scales).

It was predicted that:

*POWER would be negatively related to YOUTH, and BURNOUT, indicating that the more power the respondent possesses, the less likely to derogate the youth, or affectively withdraw.

*POWER would be negatively related to STATIC and positively related to SOCIO-ECONOMIC, indicating that the more power the respondent experiences, the more likely to attribute the youths' problems to external rather than static factors, such as personality and the agency conditions.

*YOUTH would be positively related to measures of support for the agency (e.g., the "agency is fair to child care workers") indicating that workers who consider the agency to be fair, view the youth as incapable of being helped.

Additional analyses were conducted to explore the role of perceived similarity on derogation of youth, to compare staff and youth's attributions of blame, and a canonical correlation analysis was computed to examine how child care workers integrate their perceptions of the agency, their role and the youth, with their attributions of the youths' problems.

RESULTS

Power

Using Pearson Product Moment Correlations an analysis of the relationship of POWER with YOUTH, BURNOUT, SOCIO-ECONOMIC and STATIC was conducted (Table 3). Results support predictions for significant asscciations of POWER with YOUTH and STATIC, but not with SOCIO-ECONOMIC and BURNOUT. Responses on the POWER scale (range: -4 to 14, M=6.5, SD=3.7) correlate negatively with responses on the DEROGATION OF YOUTH scale (range: -1 to 11, M=2.7, SD=1.9, 11=high derogation). The higher the reported levels of power, the less deorgation; the lower the power, the greater the derogation ($r = -.32$, $p = .0001$).

Like POWER, which measures a sense of organizational influence and impact, a sense of personal efficacy measured with the item "I can really help these kids" is associated with positive perceptions of the youth (Steil, 1979). Child care workers who feel "I can really help" (for individual items, range = 1-4, 1=strongly agree, 4=strongly disagree, M=1.7, SD=.6) view the resident youth as "basically good people"

(range 1=4, M=1.9, SD=.6) (r = .44, p = .001). A diminuition of organizational as well as personal power accelerates non-victims' tendency to derogate (Table 4).

POWER relates not only to perceptions of the youth, but also to attributions. Child care workers low in power are more likely to attribute the youths' problems to STATIC factors (range 2 to 6, M=4.1, SD=.8, 6=contribute "a lot") such as personality and the agency (r = -.26, p = .001) and are more likely to agree with the statement "Kids' problems are usually their own fault" (range 1-4, M=3.2, SD = .7) (r = .16, p = .04) than are child care workers high on power. Workers who feel deprived of organizational input view the youths' problems as internally created and enduring. No significant relationship emerges between POWER and SOCIO-ECONOMIC (range 3 to 9, 9 = contributes "a lot", M=6.7, SD=1.5) (r = -.05, p = NS).

TABLE 3

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients and Probabilities For Five Scales*

	Power	Burnout	Youth	Socio-Economic	Static
Power	---	.07 NS	-.32 .0001	-.05 NS	-.26 .001
Burnout		---	-.14 .09	.05 NS	.08 NS
Youth			---	-.11 NS	.009 NS
Socio-Economic				---	.14 NS
Static					---

*N = 152

Similarity to the Youth

Because of the controversial literature on the relationship of perceived similarity and derogation, analyses were conducted to examine the extent to which child care workers do perceive similarities between themselves and the youth, and the relationship of such perceived similarity and derogation (Table 4) (Lerner, 1980; Shaver, 1975).

Using the perception of similarity as a dependent measure, those workers who recognize similarities tend to feel most powerful in and optimistic about their work. The item "Overall, the kids are similar to me" (range 1-4, 1=strongly agree, M=2.7, SD=.9) is positively related to POWER (r = .15, p = .07). The more power the workers experience in their agencies, the more able/willing they are to identify similarities between themselves and the youth. Workers who say "I can really help these kids" recognize similarities (r = .20, p = .01); whereas workers who feel "These kids can't be helped" (M=3.4, SD=.6) fail to acknowledge similarities (r = -.23, p = .004).

A recognition of similarity may paradoxically require sufficient distance from the youth (e.g., in the form of power) to be assured of a difference. Similarity is associated with a sense of personal efficacy for helping the youth, but unrelated to an evaluation of the youth (similarity x "These kids are good people" r = .13, p = NS).

TABLE 4

Pearson Product Moment Correlations and Probabilities for Individual Items*

	"Similar"	"I Can Help"	"Good People"	"Can't be Helped"
"These kids are similar to me"	--	.20 .01	.13 NS	-.23 .004
"I can help these kids"		--	.44 .0001	-.35 .001
"These kids are good people"			--	-.27 .003
"These kids can't be helped"				--

*N=140

Attributions: Victims Vs. Nonvictims

Child care workers assert attributions for the youths' problems which follow traditional "liberal" lines. Child care workers rate the family as the major cause of youths' problems (1=not a contributor, 2=somewhat, 3=a lot: M=2.7, SD=.5), as well as the neighborhood (M=2.4, SD=.6), poverty (M=2.3, SD=.6), friends (M=2.3, SD=.5), and the youths' personality (M=2.2, SD=.5). Less significant influences include race (M=1.9, SD=.7), the agency (M=1.8, SD=.6) and bad luck (M=1.4, SD=.5).

Somewhat more distressing, however, are comparable data gathered from the youth themselves. Of the group of 98 young men and women residing in 12 public and private facilities in the New York metropolitan area, most have internalized the roots of their problems. Forty-five percent agree that "My problems are usually my own fault." Compared to the child care workers, these youth are significantly more likely to say "My problems are my own fault" (t=6.02, df=259, p=.0001) and significantly less like to say "The kids are basically good people" (t= -2.7, df = 259, p = .007). In fact, the youth rate "personality" as the most significant contributor to their problems (M=2.3, SD=.7), followed by neighborhood (M=2.1, SD=.8), friends (M=2.1, SD=.8) and families (M=2.1, SD=.7). Less significant are the agency (M=1.9, SD=.8), poverty (M=1.8, SD=.7), race (M=1.5, SD=.7) and bad luck (M=1.4, SD=.7). Youth were significantly less likely to attribute their problems to SOCIO-ECONOMIC factors than were the staff (t=6.07, df=249, p=.0001).

Contrary to the social psychological literature, these victims are more likely to make personologic attributions than their respective nonvictims (Apsler & Friedman, 1975; Ross & DiTecco, 1975). Their history of victimization, a "generation" difference, their disadvantaged and/or disempowered status, or their recognition that "taking responsibility for their actions" is socially desirable within the child care agency may contribute to this internalization of blame. The consequences of such internalization of blame remain questionable. Self-blame may facilitate personal growth, but more likely, can be most damaging to a developing self-image (c.f. Bulman & Wortman, 1977; Lasch, 1979).

Cognitive Solutions to Just World Contradictions

Faced most often with impossible tasks and inadequate resources/power, child care workers nevertheless generate explanations to reconcile the contradictions in their work. A canonical correlation analyzing the set of perception items with the set of attribution items was conducted to investigate how Child Care Workers think about their jobs and agencies in light of how they conceptualize the roots of youths' problems. The analysis reveals a major cognitive solution: what we shall label **Individualist** solution ($r = .84, \chi^2 = 248.7, df = 171, p = .001$) (Table 5).

In this solution, Individualists tend to distinguish themselves effective and responsible. They say "the agency does

not help the kids", but "I can help" and "the kids say mean things to be because they don't like me." These workers take responsibility for both on-the-job success and failure. Despite the agency's shortcomings, they feel they can help these kids. Consistent with this view, they tend to view the youths' problems as rooted, predominantly, in their neighborhoods (now that the youth are relocated in the agency, the neighborhood is no longer a problem), and not in poverty, race or personality. "I can help you, now that you have been taken out of your bad neighborhood" organizes the thinking of many child care workers.

The canonical correlation raises more questions than it answers. Nevertheless, it presents an opportunity to peek into the heads of child care workers and understand how they reconcile the contradictions that they face daily.

TABLE 5

Canonical Correlation Analysis of Perception Vs. Attribution Items

CANONICAL VARIABLE	CANONICAL CORRELATION	ASYMPTOTIC CHI-SQUARE	DF	P-LEVEL
1	.84	248.7	171	.0001
2	.81	189.3	144	.007
3	.76	137.8	119	NS

Canonical Correlation Analysis of Perceptions, Attribution Items

PERCEPTION ITEMS[a]

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
VECTOR 1	-.09*	.009	-.003	-.03	-.03	.06	-.008	-.01	.15*	.01	.02	.02	.03	-.02	-.02	-.08*	-.02	-.007	.09*

ATTRIBUTION ITEMS

	Personality	Family	Friends	Neighborhood	Agency	Bad Luck	Poverty	Race
VECTOR 1	-.10*	.04	-.0001	.10*	.09	-.10*	-.14*	.05

[a]Items listed by number and corresponding content on Table 1

DISCUSSION

Child care workers offer an intriguing population for an analysis of how varied levels of power impact upon nonvictims' visions of a just world. Of enormous influence on a "lost population", these workers promote justice or perpetuate injustice. They derive from backgrounds similar to those of the youth, can function as empathic role models or punishing disciplinarians.

Child care workers' reactions to "placed youth" are critical to the efficient and just functioning of child care agencies. Through these workers, the methods of rehabilitation, prevention and remediation can be transmitted. As likely, through these workers the hardening of youth into self-effacing trouble-makers can be assured. Because they sustain the greatest contact with youth who have been rejected by their families, schools, and often peers, child care workers can activate a supportive climate or reinforce rejection. If deprived of power in their agencies and a personal sense of efficacy in their dealings with the youth, they are likely to accomplish only the latter.

While correlational data limit the implications of our results, the reliable relationships that are derived substantiate a positive association of perceived organizational power and a personal sense of efficacy with favorable perceptions of the youth and external attributions for their problems. Like the nonvictims in Lerner and Simmons 1966 study, child

care workers who feel able to impact the lives of youth report favorable impressions; those who try but are frustrated in their efforts and/or ineffective tend to derogate. Derogation of youth is perhaps the most dangerous outcome of child care agencies that alienate workers from sources of power. As our data indicate, these youth import a sense of rejection and readily self-blame. Their families often don't want them; the courts reject them, and arriving at an agency in which even the workers indicate rejection can create some of the worst aspects of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Child care workers are distinct from most nonvictims in two ways. First, they do have power, at least over the youth. Their impressions easily transform into interactions and can be readily internalized by the youth. One worker who considers these adolescents to be "bad people" can damage the self-images of many. Second, and perhaps more interesting, while these nonvictims derive from backgrounds similar to the youth, the victimization forms part of their history. The relationship of perceived similarity and victim derogation, regularly debated in the injustice literature addresses the question: Does similarity promote or diminish victim blaming? (c.f. Chaikin & Darley, 1973; Lerner & Agar, 1972; Novak & Lerner, 1968; Shaver, 1970). The data reported in this paper, in which perceived similarity is a dependent variable (not manipulated by an experimenter) suggest that perceived similarity co-varies with a sense of power, and remains unrelated to perceptions of victims. Re-

spondents who report similarities between themselves and the youth tend to feel among the more "powerful", and assume that the youth "can be helped". In most circumstances, similarity with a victim may be ego-threatening (hence the derogation). In this case, perceived similarity may be ego-enhancing, for those who feel sufficiently powerful and secure of their relative advantage. Having risen above the circumstances of these youth, these workers may pride themselves on the similarities and their achievements. "I've been there and look at me today" reaffirms their struggles and their accomplishments. As the similarity debate continues to brew, under some conditions, in which personal victimization is unlikely, similarity between victim and nonvictim may facilitate constructive interactions and mitigate derogation.

Implications

Interventions in child care, juvenile justice and other areas of human services target, primarily, individual "victims" for service. The data reported today suggest, alternatively, that interventions designed solely for youth are insufficient to improve conditions in juvenile justice: training youth to exhibit positive self-images, or to "get in touch" with their strengths may easily be undermined by child care workers who, in order to reinforce their own "just worlds" derogate these same youth. As long as the youth, workers, families, courts and schools focus blame (and remedies) on the adolescents and children involved, a "justice" system designed toward rehabili-

tation and toward encouraging self-growth will be limited.

Theoretically many questions persist. Perhaps most gnawing is, "Do child care workers seek to redress a just world by derogating victims, or do they assert ego-enhancing attributions to compensate for their presumed lack of impact?" I am inclined to argue the former. Undoubtedly power affects the tendency to derogate (or not); whether this persists in non-interdependent situations (in which ego-enhancing attributions are most likely to emerge) remains an empirical question. To test this, child care workers would be asked to assess youth with whom they do not work, and they would have to evidence no, or a weak relationship between their power and derogation of the youth. Given the extensive documentation of victim derogation by independent strangers (much of which has been conducted by members of this symposium) such an outcome could easily be expected (Lerner, 1980). The tendency to assert ego-enhancing attributions does not explain the general proclivity for victim blaming other than in situations of interdependent outcomes (c.f. Miller & Ross, 1975; Fine, 1979).

The test of the just world theory with child care workers poses an interesting examination of how personal and structural factors collude to buttress what is often an illusion of justice. Child care workers are perhaps among the most committed to a vision of a just world; they live as evidence that you <u>can</u> make it if you try. Eager to perpetuate this vision, and often confronted with evidence to the contrary, child care

workers may be candidates, ultimately, for the greatest derogation of victims. The "just world" view, and meritocratic philosophy so intimately organized (and may still organize) their lives, that a threat thereof may be intolerable.

If the need to restore justice is operative, is it reasonable to expect child care workers to ever be sufficiently empowered to not derogate? Are their tasks and responsibilities not doomed to be ineffectual--inevitably to be resolved in derogation? Unfortunately, in most juvenile justice systems, agencies are often based on negative reinforcement and hierarchical distribution of power; with salaries low; peer support often undermined by peers monitoring for abusive behavior; successes often remain unrecognized by supervisors and unrewarded by the youth involved; and feedback is attained primarily when a violation or agency embarrassment hits the media (e.g. "Seven Kids Break from Public Institution--Assault Three Old Ladies"). These workers aim to assist disadvantaged youth; once they recognize their minimal potential to do so and their agencies' constraints on accomplishing this, these workers may re-align a sense of a just world. To this dilemma the unfortunate answer rides with derogation of the youth. The just world theory, and its lucid explanation of victim derogation, needs to incorporate more fully the distinguishing variable of power, as it influences the tendency to condemn or condone already victimized youth.

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